

HANES



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Newsletter of the Cynon Valley History Society Cylchlythur Cymdeithas Hanes Cwm Cynon

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Welcome to the twenty-third issue of "Hanes" which has been prepared "under fire" as it were, the "fire" being the pressure of digging out material for "Old Aberdare" Vol. 9 together with the usual domestic pressures.

Volume 9 begins with an essay on local history written by a man of whom most local people know nothing. He was Ivor Astle, born in November 1881 in Cardiff. He followed his father into journalism and was appointed editor of the "Aberdare Times" before he reached the age of 20. He was afterwards on the staff of several provincial newspapers. It is not known why Astle, a native of Cardiff, wrote "The History of Aberdare" but we will give him the benefit of the doubt and assume that he was much taken by the charms of his adoptive town.

Astle's essay was never published, but it did survive, and Aberdare library has a copy, (Ref No. ACL 942.97 A8) made from the original manuscript in the National Library of Wales which was bought from a member of the Astle family.

For some years doubt has been expressed about some of the information in Astle's history, but today his work is read with a greater degree of confidence, and for that reason it was felt that it was time to put an edited version of Astle's History before the membership.

The second essay in volume 9 was written by our late Chairman, Norman Price. Norman was putting the finishing touches to this work in February 2000 when he died suddenly and unexpectedly. This true story of heroism at sea during the war is of interest to us because one of the participants was a Cynon Valley man.

The Society has already published two articles by Edwin Greening on matters relating to coal mining.

They were;

"A collier boy in the nineteen twenties". OA No 2. And

"A collier boy in the 1926 coal lock-out". OA No 8.

His third essay (again on matters relating to coal mining) is "Memories of the Windber Collieries 1927-1931" which will appear in OA Vol. 9.

OBITUARY

Several members of the committee attended the funeral service at the Forest of Dean Crematorium on 17th of April 2002 of Edward Gordon Williams of Lady Mill, Moun-ton, near Chepstow. Edward was 85 yrs old and a member of the Williams family of Aberdare which had mining interests at Abernant. He was greatly interested in his family history.

Edward was a long-standing member of the Society and only very bad weather would prevent him travelling to its meetings.

He will always be remembered for his enthusiasm, kindly nature, and readiness to share information with others working in the same field.

Richard Evans (known to his friends as "Dick Penderyn") of 31 Aberdare Rd, Glyn Neath, died on the 27th of April at the age of 72. After a service in the crowded Siloam chapel on the 2nd of May he was buried within the precincts of that chapel.

Richard was not a member of the Society but was a speaker whose appearance at the lectern was always eagerly awaited. Richard rarely spoke from notes, taking his cues from one of his well-worn sets of slides. Nevertheless he was known for his ability to hold his listeners in the palm of his hand, and it is not surprising that he was able to gain a large circle of friends, drawn from the academic world and from persons living locally who had similar interests.

Richard was the man to ask when any information on matters concerning Penderyn or Ystradfellte were in question, and when he moved to Glyn Neath upon his marriage to Joan it was not long before his knowledge of that district became worthy of respect.

Richard's other interests included steam-powered vehicles and model making, and the writer remembers a ride on a full-size steam-roller which Richie owned for some years.

Richard will remain in our thoughts for many years to come.

JFM

EDITORIAL

An audience of about 60 persons turned up at the museum on the 20th of June to listen to Mr John Price, who (assisted by Mr Andrew Chainey), showed a compilation of films made by the late Mr Archie Andrews. Mr Andrews was a pharmacist in Aberaman and members enjoyed looking out for relatives and friends in the clips which Mr Price showed. Our thanks are due to the museum curator, Mr Chris Wilson, for his co-operation.

Library News: May 2002.

The project to digitise the photograph collections held in Cynon Valley libraries has now been completed and work has begun on the collection of Rhondda photographs held in Treorchy library. At present the website only contains the images taken from the photograph collection in Aberdare library, but we hope to relaunch the site with images of the lower end of the Cynon Valley and the Rhondda as soon as possible. We are currently in the process of trying to secure funding to extend the life of the project, to allow us to digitise all the images held in Rhondda CynonTaff libraries and local images in the Glyn Davies collection at Aberdare library.

The URL of the website is: www.rhondda-cynon-taff.gov.uk/photos

Work is now in progress to make available a collection of programmes and newspaper reports that was donated to us by Cwmbach Male Voice Choir. They provide a valuable addition to our collection and, along with the material we already hold, provide an excellent resource for research on the choir.

NEWS FROM THE MUSEUM

The past few months have witnessed this writer traversing the valley from north to south and east to west. During this period I have spent many hours aiming and taking numerous shots within the area. From Abercynon to Penderyn and Godreaman to Llwydcoed I have worked my way from village to village armed with a Canon. This however was effected not with a Howitzer but with an Eos 500. As you can guess I have been out and about with camera and pad. My mission is to photograph as many chapels and previous chapel sites as possible. To go boldly where no assistant curator had gone before.

With some chapel sites now being completely re-designated and currently in different use and others gone for ever, my journey has often proved eventful and sometimes amusing. Approaching one ex-chapel, now designated a garage, the "workers" were remarkably keen to avoid being recorded on film. There were also many murmurs of "DSS" from those fast disappearing from the inside of another ex-chapel currently being converted into private use on seeing the camera and notepad being put into operation.

Sadly, many a hiatus in a current street scene merely betrays the original of a chapel. Culture and learning have in many instances now merely given way to rubble, or "To Let" signs, or strangely-named private residences. Sadly, also, there are too many local persons who, when asked about a chapel that was once proudly standing in their midst, betray no knowledge of it whatsoever. Once-respected icons of reverence now sadly display graffiti, obscenities and razor wire.

These cultural edifices, which once dominated social life in the area, deserve a great deal of our admiration and attention, as their impact upon our society and lives has been deep and long standing. Indeed, non-conformity's effect upon our lives still continues to be considerable today.

The recording of these places of worship for posterity has been deemed by the museum a necessity. The practical work of effecting the recording has been given to this writer.

Ultimately, if possible, we wish to possess on CD-ROM a photographic archive of all the chapels and sites that were at one time in existence throughout the valley. In addition, to correspond with these images we wish to collate as much relevant information as practical. We desire eventually to have dates of opening and closing, current usage, denominational status, language of the chapel, etc to be placed on file

I am about to visit the Glamorgan Record Office where they have details of the 1978 Mid-Glamorgan chapel survey that was conducted by the then Planning Department at that time to help expand our database. It would appear that the end of the 1970s was a good period to choose to take a record, as many chapels have since that time disappeared.

However, if there are any readers out there who feel that they can help us in our worthy attempts by lending or donating us images of a chapel, then we will be only too pleased to hear from you. We can copy negatives, slides, and photographic images here at the museum. Therefore originals need not leave the readers possession. Any Chapel history souvenirs would also be welcome. It would be interesting to acquire images of the insides of chapels if possible as these appear to be quite rare. Hopefully I will be able to record the interior of some of our chapels but this will require funds being made available for such a task.

Therefore, if you feel you can assist, please contact me at the Cynon Valley museum and gallery on 01685 886729.

Our non-conformist heritage deserves to be fully recorded!

G.G.

Editor's note. G.G. is, of course, Gareth Gill, Assistant curator at the Aberdare museum. I am grateful to him for the above contribution relating to the work of the museum. The History

Society is also engaged on this wide-ranging topic and it is the committee's intention to produce a book in the not-too-distant future based on the researches of Mr Alan Vernon Jones. The book, it is hoped, will supplement the accumulation of information and artefacts at the museum and assist in a comprehensive appraisal of this all-important aspect of our heritage.

THE WAY WE WERE THEN (No 14).

The death of Matthew Wayne, Esq of Aberdare. (CMG 2 March 1853)

This gentleman died on Monday last, at the age of 74, of paralysis. In him the commerce of Aberdare has suffered a real loss. No man was more respected-no man more upright and more beloved by his neighbours and workmen than the deceased. It is not generally known, but it is a fact worthy of record that Mr Wayne was the first man that ever sent coal to Cardiff from the Aberdare basin, being thus the first to open that traffic from which this port, the Taff Vale railway and the parish of Aberdare have received an impetus which is quite un-paralleled in the history of the coal trade. To him more than to anyone else Aberdare owes unquestionably its present prosperity as he it was who first found out, and brought to the notice of the public the valuable properties of its steam coal. Yet no man went about more unassumingly; no man meddled with the affairs of others less, and, we may add, there was no man more straightforward in his commercial transactions than Mr Wayne. He was the creator of his own fortune which he gained by steady perseverance and untiring energy. At his death, he had the satisfaction of seeing around him a family of three sons, greatly respected filling influential positions, and very largely engaged in the iron, the tin and the coal trades of this country. We had the pleasure of being intimately acquainted with him, and we can satisfactorily sum up his private character in one sentence-that we never heard him speak ill of any man. Even when he had cause to do so and when others think they may do so innocently and on good grounds, he was invariably silent. If he would say no good of a man, he would say no ill of him. His death was brought on very suddenly. He was struck with paralysis at Cardiff, on his way from London a fortnight before he died. He never rallied. On Sunday he had another fit and on Monday he died, much regretted by the whole parish.

Death of Dr George John Scale, MRCS, LRCP.

Dr Scale died on 11th of May at Sydney, Australia at the age of 89. His cremated remains were conveyed to Aberdare, and placed in the family vault following a committal conducted by the vicar (the Rev R Ward, B. A.) Dr Scale was a brother to the late Dr. T W Scale MD, of Gloucester House Aberdare.

(d) A correspondent wrote to the "Leader" about the disappearance of "Another old landmark" of Aberdare.

This related to the demolition of two house and a shop near the Town Hall which, the complainant alleged, were the residence of the vicar. Furthermore, a patch of green sward in front of the houses gave its name to that part of the town (Green Fach.). Finally, an inscribed stone had been found "High up under the eaves" bearing the inscription P.T. 1830.

Responding, the editor stated that the recent demolitions were not of the first building on the site. The first building on the site was the dwelling of an earlier incumbent, the rev Thos Jones who had been vicar of the combined parishes of Aberdare and Llanwynno for nearly forty years. The editor stated that the inscribed stone bore the initials of a subsequent incumbent, the Rev Price Thomas.

Eventually the site of the vicarage became surrounded by pubs, namely the Bon-y-Groes, Cross-keys, the Wellington Inn, the Heathcock Inn and the Green Dragon.

(e) From contemporary evidence it seems that the acquisition of money and the increase in social status which came to successful entrepreneurs in the coal industry was not always accompanied by a move to conduct which reflected much credit upon the person concerned. For example, Jenkin Rhys, a mineral agent at Llwydcoed was a justice of the peace who had four sons, one of whom, Rees Hopkin Rhys was, like his father, a mineral agent. On the 12th of May, 1857, R H Rees assaulted the booking constable at Llwydcoed, for which, at a meeting of the Aberdare magistrates held on the next day, he was fined ten shillings.

The Llewellyn family were also capable of looking after themselves in a fracas. In February 1884 the banksman at Bwllfa colliery was astonished to see Rees Llewellyn and William Smith fighting in the cage as it rose to the surface. Smith had been leaving work early to go to a funeral and his explanation obviously did not satisfy his manager. We do not know who started the fight but a summons for assault was taken out by Smith and a cross-summons by Llewellyn. Wisely perhaps, the magistrates dismissed both complaints.

Llewellyn's eldest son, David R Llewellyn, found himself before the magistrates on at least one occasion (June 1906) as a result of assaulting a railway guard. The fine was £5.